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The Global-Ready Student

Entrées to Global Understanding

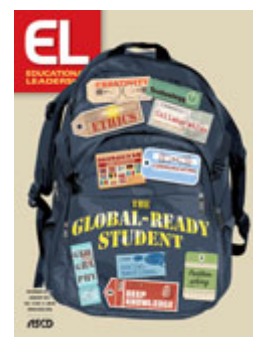
William Kist

Helping students see how their own stories intersect with cultures in all parts of the globe deepens their understanding of globalization.

2016—was it a global educator's dream or a nightmare? On the one hand, humans continued to connect to one another across great distances more instantaneously than ever. Never has it been so inexpensive and user-friendly to communicate with someone many time zones away. On the other hand, terrorism and violence occurring across the world have prompted frequent calls for isolationism—some including not-so-veiled racism and xenophobia—from leaders and voters. It's clearer than ever that our students need to understand the implications of globalization, regardless of the subject being taught or the student's age.

I've been observing these heated conversations about globalism from the campus of Kent State University, a place with historical significance out of another fractious era. On May 4, 1970, four students were shot to death at Kent State as they protested the United States' involvement in the war in Vietnam and Cambodia. These young people were killed not far from where my office now sits, their deaths caused by unrest surrounding international affairs. The saying "all politics are local" holds true, even when the issues being debated involve controversies across the world. Indeed, there's a déjà vu quality to current comments urging us to disparage or keep out people from other cultures. For some of us, this discourse conjures up tense memories, not only of 1970, but also of 1939, when xenophobic speech was heard in many countries.

The good news is that in 2016, students and teachers have a huge communication advantage that students in previous eras didn't. Today's young people can have a virtually instant view of tumultuous events happening around the world through their smartphones. Not only can they watch crucial events, but they can also view comments from people in many countries as traditional media report on tweets and blog posts responding to these events.



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But do students know how to access such worldwide comments and look at them critically? Are teachers helping youth understand key world events in ways that actively engage them? In this article, I suggest some practical activities that can help our students get in touch with the world all around them. Ironically, over my years of researching this issue, I've discovered that our so-called "selfie culture" actually gives teachers an entrée to discuss with students just how meaningfully interconnected we really are.

Powerful, Doable Strategies

In *The Global School* (Solution Tree, 2013), I describe instructional strategies—drawn from interviews with teachers around the world—designed to equip students with what Myers and Eberfors (2010) call intercultural critical literacy. For teachers using such strategies, "global education" goes beyond pedestrian cultural-awareness activities and moves students toward higher-level examination of the power dynamics behind world challenges. The Internet has brought us closer than ever to people and cultures that, a few decades ago, we could only have encountered through great expense and sacrifice. The strategies described here can help students interact beyond borders—meaningfully and critically.

Fortunately, teachers across the planet are using many easily replicable global education strategies—sometimes with profound results. Just ensuring that students read texts or view movies and television programs from many countries, followed by serious discussion, goes far in developing empathy, which aligns with principles of global education (Bracher, 2013). Taking global education a step further, according to tenets of "critical literacy," students need to develop a critical sense—the ability to go beyond simple cultural awareness to develop tools for understanding the power dynamics that lie behind any text (Luke & Woods, 2009).

As a start, media literacy teachers have for decades asked students to read English versions of foreign newspapers, often comparing and contrasting how U.S. and foreign media cover events. This strategy is even easier now that all major world newspapers have online outlets. Additionally, some teachers assign students to use Google Earth and similar resources to design virtual field trips or interview international experts through Skype or Google Hangouts. A few schools have adopted entire curriculums that emphasize global education, provided by groups like the International Baccalaureate Program and the Asia Society.

Chad Allan, a former Spanish teacher and current instructor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Temple University, has students bring in covers of magazines from different countries. He explains, "In small groups, each student describes what the cover shows, why, how [that image] relates to him or her personally, and what it says to the culture or country in which it was published." As students share perceptions about all the covers, everyone gets ideas about how others see the world, building that intercultural critical literacy. Chad reports, "The central idea is to see that a simple image evokes and guides us to many other ideas and new knowledge. The discussion moves to what we know about our own possible misconceptions and prejudices."

A similar assignment using pop culture texts asks students to listen to protest songs from across the world and deconstruct what the song says and what the audience is supposed to

take away (Lynskey, 2011). Teachers have also brought food into classrooms, asking students to look at so-called "foreign" food to see just how Americanized (or not) the recipes and ingredients are.

The Multimodal Memoir

My own teaching strategies for global education have coalesced around an assignment I call the Multimodal Memoir (see "[Multimodal Memoir Assignment](#)"). For this project, students assemble and reflect on the texts that have been meaningful to them in some way. Through this repurposing of "old" texts into a new memoir, students realize the amazing diversity of forms of communication that have shaped them and reflect on how these texts point the way toward new inquiry paths (Kist, 2010).

As the project's culmination, students present their memoirs in multimodal forms such as PowerPoints, Prezis, or videos ([See a sample Multimodal Memoir](#)). I've assigned this project for many years, but only recently seen its implications for global education. As the presentations unfold, students don't have to look far to realize just how globalized each of us already is.

This realization has surfaced as more international students attend Kent State. Their Multimodal Memoirs are fascinating, incorporating such varied texts as Russian folk tales, songs from the Saudi Arabian Top 40, and Mexican telenovelas. It's also been interesting to see what texts from other cultures, including the United States, find their way into the memoirs of students born overseas. I've seen 1970's U.S. cop shows included, as well as iconic children's book series like *Winnie the Pooh*. As my mostly American students watch these memoirs, they realize not only how many starkly different textual experiences people have across the globe, but also how many similar ones we have. It's enlightening to analyze what media and textual messages resonate with different audiences—and why.

A recent presentation by a student from Saudi Arabia revealed how transformative this assignment can be (Kist & Aljasser, 2015). My doctoral student, Amal Aljasser, was not physically present for this sharing. She had to spend her summer in Saudi Arabia, so she joined us for every class period via WebEx, a platform for video conferencing. Amal composed her autobiography in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and presented her childhood growing up as a bilingual child in Canada. She noted that her life textual experiences both overlapped and diverged from those of her U.S.-born classmates:

I [had] to practice both Arabic and English languages. [Yet] I was familiar with ... reading Walt Disney books and watching family TV shows like *Full House*. ... After reviewing my literacy journey through my multimodal autobiography, I realized how my environment and multiple cultures (via their texts) shaped me and my literacy practices (Kist & Aljasser, 2015, p. 78).

As my students watched this presentation from the other side of the earth, they commented through a back channel on Twitter, which Amal could respond to as well. This Twitter

conversation was joined by several followers from outside the class, further widening the geography of the conversation. For instance, Amal tweeted, in response to one of the student's memoirs, "*My Little Pony!* Was my fave. It's nice 2 see similarities in our autobiographies. I guess there are a lot of (us from the) 90s generation [in the class]."

Although there were similarities in the memoirs, there were also differences. Because the memoir project focuses on important texts from our lives, those watching Amal's presentation were introduced to texts that they had not heard of, including popular music and folk tales from the Middle East. One student from that class tweeted about a certain text Amal had mentioned: "Thanks for sharing, bringing this into my own library." A student joining us from Columbus, Ohio, tweeted "Sharing gives us more opportunities for connecting."

After these international experiences with the Multimodal Memoir, I refined the assignment, adding elements that stimulate students to think about the overlapping experiences we all have, no matter our country of origin.

Extending Connections

As an extension of this assignment, you might ask students to choose one of their selected texts and talk about its *international* qualities. For example, I have talked about my experiences growing up watching reruns of *Speed Racer* cartoons that were produced in Japan in the 1960s. We talk about how although *Speed Racer* was created for the Western market—and drew upon such models as James Bond—it originated as Japanese anime. Both American students and those from other countries have talked about watching Bollywood films or listening to Latin music. Although most of my students have not traveled internationally, it becomes clear how globalized their text consumption has been, even when they didn't seek out these kinds of texts.

In fact, the Multimodal Memoir project can become a kind of globalized "Kevin Bacon" game. Challenge students to find some common point of artistic or cultural connection between any two texts—until it's revealed that all texts are related to one another on some level. Students can use this gamified part of the assignment to curate their own international experiences (both virtual and face-to-face), using apps such as Evernote or Subtext to capture and archive the important texts of their lives. Students could start a log—in a Word document or a wiki—in which they record their international connections, a log that may become lifelong.

Of course, the Multimodal Memoir is no panacea; I've seen students who remained unmoved by it. But often the day we exhibit the memoirs takes on a celebratory, carnival-like feel as students learn about one another's life passions. After we've watched a few presentations, it clicks for students that we (or our ancestors) have all come from somewhere else—and so have the texts we love and the texts we criticize. Barriers come down between students as they say things like "I never knew that you liked *I Love Lucy!*" or "I grew up reading the *Eragon* books, too!"

Guiding students to develop deeper understandings of global connections has lasting implications. A study reported in the *New York Times* (Mankiw, 2016) found that people's psychological worldviews affect their views on trade issues, regardless of their personal

experiences—for example, whether or not, their own work lives have been affected favorably by trade policies. Students' views on whether connections and understandings between people in various countries are desirable—views possibly formed in your class—could affect how they approach immigration, solutions to poverty, and other issues.

Clearly, we teachers have a lot of work to do. Perhaps if we allow students to unpack the globalization that exists within themselves and within all of us, we'll finally be able to say with some accuracy (harking back to the era of 1970), "The times, they are a-changin'."

Author's note: For more ideas and to connect with global educators, visit the [Global Education Conference](#), the [Harvard Global Education Innovation Initiative](#), and [WorldSavvy](#).

Multimodal Memoir Assignment

This assignment encourages you to think about all the various texts of your life and your own history as a multimodal reader and writer.

Your objective is to create a screen-based representation of how these various texts have influenced your life. Such texts may include books, films, television shows, music, newspapers, sports, food, cars, or architecture (to name a few examples). Visit Google Images, Flickr, YouTube, and similar sites to find noncopyrighted images or video clips related to your texts; you may also create your own images or videos. Create this assignment in a program that allows you to digitally package words, images, video, and music, such as [VoiceThread](#), [Storymaker](#), [Umanjin](#), or [Comic Life](#).

You will not turn in any "hard copy." You'll be graded on your presentation on the basis of how well you answer these questions:

Does your presentation contain specific, meaningful artifacts from your life? Is there a balance among your emergent, adolescent, and adult literacy years?

Do one or more themes about your multimodal life run through your autobiography?

How thoroughly do you reflect on the place non-print-dominated media have played in your life? Are a variety of kinds of texts represented? Have you reflected on lessons learned from your multimodal literacy past?

Did your presentation use innovative graphics and/or music?

Have you drawn implications regarding how many countries or cultures are represented among the important texts of your life?

How have these texts positioned you and other audience members to understand various cultures?

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